

Living with lesbian lists

by [Eva Jakszon](#)

The following writings are collected from my postings to the Euro-Sappho mailing list during late 1996, and were not composed to present either a comprehensive or authoritative view on the subject matter. They are, rather, scattered thoughts by one lesbian Internet activist, archived here for the potential benefit of others who might be interested.

This collection of texts is not complete and it might happen that I will add more after January 1997, which was when I put this document together for the first time.

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1. Where I am coming from

I've been on the Internet (at it is now) since 1991, after a period as a member of gay/lesbian BBSs (bulletin board systems) starting from maybe around 1988. Over those years, I've been on tens of mailing lists, and started my first mailing list in April 1993. In the beginning of 1997, I "owned" (technically or otherwise) 5 large and 3 small alive (and a few dormant) lists, with a subscriber base of about 1500 people.

I didn't become a lesbian Internet activist overnight. Earlier, I used to be a lesbian activist for seven years and in 1981-83, I took care of secretarial routines of the now Dutch-based [LILS](#) (International Lesbian Information Service) for 2 1/2 years. Being very hard of hearing, I found my energies running out faster than it was renewed, so that there was a withdrawal phase from mid-1980s to early 1990s, during which I concentrated in writing and publishing instead. With the advent of Internet, I found that I could participate and organize without those daily obstacles which I have to face, after all, as a hard of hearing woman in what is somewhat dubiously called "real life".

A brief introduction to my lists (as they were in January 1997):

My busiest list [Euro-sappho](#), is an open, and rather large list. I also own, in some way or other, several other lists: [Finnish sapfo](#) (with 60 subscribers), [Finnish women's studies](#) (list has 650 subscribers), [WISE-L](#) for European women's studies has 350 subscribers, [Wild-list](#) (European lesbian studies) has 120 subscribers. As the systems manager of the [Finnish Green League](#), I look over their several lists and sometimes start up new majordomo lists in that system when requested. There are also two smaller lists, [roque](#) (for European lesbian writing) and [DD-LI](#) (for hearing impaired lesbians).

On my personal web pages, one can find more about my [current goings-on](#).

2. A personal perspective on the herstory of lesbian lists

After hanging around in gay BBSes for a long time, to get access to the Internet and particularly its lesbian spaces can be a strong experience. To me, this happened in late 1991 and early 1992. The first list I joined was the then very new Lesbians in Science (LIS), after which there was just a short step into joining U.S. sappho.

Lesbian net space in the form of the sappho mailing list was founded by a straight woman called Jean Marie Diaz, aka AMBAR, who thought that lesbians need a space of their own. That is why she started U.S. sappho in May 1987. In 1991 she handed the list over to Zonker, who still runs it.

To be on a lesbian mailing list and have my mailbox full of lesbian voices was a joy - and I'm sure it is a joy that thousands of lesbians using Internet have experienced ever since. For quite some time, it did not really matter what those voices said or where they were from, as the fact that they existed, and I could hear them (as a very hard of hearing lesbian) was enough. But time went on, and one day, conversing with women on another continent was somehow not enough. Back then, in early 1993, there were no European lists for women or lesbians at all. So, why not start one myself? That was how Finnish sapfo-list began in April 1993. It was a bag of mixed blessings - a channel for Finnish lesbian discussion, but at the same time, most list members were living in Helsinki, many already familiar to me, which made the list good for many networking purposes but which also lessened the impact of the list as a virtual meeting place of minds.

The origins of Euro-Sappho are a story I've often told, here is another version:

The year was 1994. It was spring. There was the One and Only list, (U.S.) sappho, the mother of all lesbian lists. By then, it had become big. It was large. It was growing into a list with nearly 700 subscribers. It was so big that on worst days, there could be over a hundred postings. There was a day when there were, I think, over 300 postings from that one list. In one day.

U.S. sappho had become overwhelming. It seemed quite futile to be a small European piece of spice among a large mass of Americans who were in pursuit of topics of interest mainly to American lesbians. It's okay that those topics are discussed somewhere, but when you are a European in a vast sea of virtual Americans, and have been there a **long** time, you might start to long after a space of your own.

So, it was spring 1994. I had been through rough times in my private life (and was to have more of them ahead). I felt like posting away to find some distraction. But it was so hard: because U.S. sappho was practically the only place to post to (unless I wrote to Finnish sapfo-list instead, where you can 'tell' your hat flip down a bit more), and so I had to be content with posting to U.S. sappho.

After writing and writing, and being aware (after having been on U.S. sappho for 1 1/2 years) that my bytes would continue to add an exotic Finnish flavour to the sea of its postings while giving me but a little nourishment back in the long run, I knew that the time was becoming ripe.

I had started Finnish sapfo-list a year earlier, so I had some experience. I knew somehow that no one else was about to start a European list very soon (maybe someone might have - but I did not detect any plans anywhere). I spent some time planting the seed in my own brain.

Then the OWLS list was started with some hue and cry. I remember there was some discussion as to why those "flat-twitter's-bins" would need a separate list when everyone could stay on and make U.S. sappho all the bigger and better and ever-more-inclusive somehow. That was in May/June 1994 (but the exact dates are a bit fuzzy for me about OWLS).

I remember, particularly, when I was inspired to post into an erotic U.S. sappho thread (back then I could still join threads like that with a little more earnest), and a woman from Kansas or somewhere like that started picking at me, choosing the as a target of some rather sarcastic public comments. I wrote to her privately to ask what on earth was the matter. She replied back that she found me a self-important snob, and that such people do deserve to be reminded of what they are really like. That certainly added to my motivation to find an alternative where a European could be more of herself without feeling culturally like "the odd girl out".

In end of June 1994 I wrote to Kari Koivumäki, the seta.fi sysadmin. ([SETA](#) is the Finnish national organization for sexual equality, working for gay/lesbian/etc. rights.) Kari had installed the majordomo list software at seta.fi in 1993 when it was still running on a really antique unix OS those days (before linux etc. became a stable, free of charge alternative). seta.fi is Kari's creation. He is a nurse specializing in terminal care of AIDS patients, and he is also a free-lance unix wizard in search of new challenges. He has done a very impressive job in building the seta.fi system slowly up from a scratch on a minimal budget, as his hobby, to serve the national needs of Finnish lesbian/gay/etc. community.

I asked Kari back then: could it be possible to start a European lesbian list on seta.fi? Kari wrote back at once: "Give me its name and I'll set it up." And thus Euro-Sappho started, on July 1, 1994.

U.S. sappho is still out there - and nowadays, I think of it quite warmly, as it is almost a mother to us here - euro-sappho and all those other lists weren't born into a void.

Here is a compact very partial history listing of events of importance for lesbian online communities from my memory and from other sources:

- 1987 U.S. sappho list starts
- 1991 LIS (lesbians in science) and other new lists appear
- 1993 Finnish sapfo starts (in April). First (wider known) lesbian IRC spaces (spring)
- 1994 very many new lesbian lists appear: OWLS in late spring, Euro-Sappho in July, Dykenet in November
- 1994/95 U.S.-based Lesbian.org is started. Many new mailing lists are appearing.
- 1995 A Dykes World web pages are started. European First Usenet news lesbian group soc.women.lesbian-and-bi

3. Lesbian lists today

Euro-sappho became a large list, and with time, even it started to suffer from the same ailments as U.S. sappho: too many subscribers, too many differing expectations, sometimes even too much traffic (although this of course depends on the perspective). I think that the only way out from these problems, on any mailing list, will be to stop other mailing lists. Once there will be several European lists, for example, the pressure on one list (like Euro-Sappho) will inevitably ease.

When Euro-Sappho started, there were only two lists that were European: one was the Finnish Sapfo-list (in Finnish) and the other one was the then quite slow uk-moss-women, started by a man. Later, new lists have appeared. There is now LLI, in Italy, and Sapfo-Norden, a Nordic list run on a Swedish server. And I predict there will be many more.

There is also the list for European writers, called rogue. (There is an application procedure one has to tackle before being added. The list is fairly small and the discussions are 100% about writing, no chat there at all.) Another European list for those involved or interested in lesbian studies from an European perspective is the wild-list. (wild comes from WISE Lesbian Division, WISE being an European women's studies coordinating body.)

I keep a webpage of lesbian (& related) lists. The listing, with subscription informations, can be found at these two locations:

<http://www.lesbian.org/lesbian-lists/index.html>
<http://www.sappho.net/lesbian-lists/>

To check out where the net-resources are, I made some statistics out of the data on the listing (updated in January 1997):

- General or topical lists that are running on a North American server, with English as their default language, largely with North American subscriber base, with no geographical specifications: **39 lists**
- The same as above but with local emphasis: **8 lists**
- Lists that aim to be international or meant for geographically/culturally specific audience that are run on a North American server: **3 lists**
- Lists run on European servers (these are all in Finland, though) that have European focus, main language is English: **3 lists**
- General or topical lists that are running on a European server, with English as their default language, largely with North American subscriber base, with no geographical specifications: **1 list**
- Lists that are run on European servers mainly using the language of the server's host country: **5 lists**
- Lists run on Australian servers, with English as their default language: **1 list**

That is:

- 50 lists on North American servers
- 9 lists on European servers
- 1 list on other servers.

There are of course lists that are so private that they won't be listed, as one can only join by being recommended by someone. They are so numerous these days that I think there are more of them than there are publicly known lists.

To sum up my statistics: if there are somewhere between 50-300 women on most of the above lists (some have less, some more), and considering the overlap in subscriptions, I think the size of the subscriber base of all these lesbian mailing lists might be somewhere around 5,000-15,000 - maybe 10,000 as a good guess? And my careful estimate, based on the subscriber listings of several lists, is that over 9/10 of those are from North America. Compared with the existence of tens of millions of Internet users, the lesbian mailing list communities are like lonely lesbian bars dispersed in a huge global village, yet lively inside.

4. Different kinds of lists

When a list grows large, there are probably many women with different expectations and needs, all gathered together. One day, such a list might start to acquire some atmosphere of a more private list and the discussions grow gradually more tense - as if women were expecting more, waiting for more and more feedback - often because it is not possible in a big forum. The way forward could be new, more private lists (not to replace a larger list, but in addition to it).

There is a distinction between a more public list and a more private list (not identical with the distinction between formal vs. personal) that can be described like this:

- A public list is open: anyone (with certain restrictions) can join. Usually, anyone can post.
 - A private list is closed: the membership is limited (often by recommendation or other such processes) and only list members can post.
- There is some distinction with the matter content of public and private lists, which varies from list to list, but is often defined along these lines:
- On a more public list, there will be a variety of postings: announcements, queries, stories, chat, debate, personal postings, etc. The restrictions come often from practical purposes (resources, list focus, etc.) and from basic netiquette.
 - On a more private list, there will often be a list charter stating some rules, the most common of which often are, for example:
 - Confidentiality. Because postings are often quite personal and intimate, one is required to keep them confidential and never tell about to outsiders.
 - Full participation. Often, lurking is strongly discouraged, and those who will not contribute, might be requested to leave.
 - Supportiveness. The list provides a space for sharing intimate details, and list members are expected to be attentive of each other.

A public list does not exclude intimate postings, if list members choose to post them. What makes it different from a private list is that on a public list, other members are not necessarily expected to respond in a like manner, unless they themselves choose to do so.

If you go and have a look at the list of lesbian lists, you will see that there are tens of those lists. But the listing is far from complete. There are also many, maybe 10-20, or more? private lists that are not listed there, because those lists are really private. Only members know of them, and one can't just simply send a request to be added - usually, one needs to be recommended by another list member, and has to accept an often quite long list charter of rules.

The first private list I know of was started in 1994. It was one of the offsprings of the U.S. sappho list, when a group of women felt that the large public list was not a safe or natural place for their personal thoughts. Also, they wanted an emptier mailbox with more weighty, more deeply intimate, supportive, warm and meaningful postings.

Is a private list a really the miracle solution for getting rid of meaningless excess bytes you might feel are filling up your mailbox, and replacing them with such postings that you will really want to read? Not always. For example, on a small private and intimate list, you are likely to become intimate with more women than on a larger list. This can happen that so many women will become involved/separated/etc. with each other (or alienated from each other!) that in the end, many list members will form a complicated online community with a very entangled web of romantic or platonic goings on. That can sometimes make the private list more of a strain than more easily deleted chat from total strangers.

Also, the rule of privacy can be hard if not impossible to keep. There could be investigations as to "leaks" of confidential list postings to outsiders, and heavy occasional debates as to whether the list is safe for its members or not. A small private list can be heavily dependent on its listowner as the "lady of the virtual salon", and on her personal likes and dislikes, and moods. And lastly, such a list can doze off, if the interpersonal forces and electrifying driving the conversation slacken. On a large list, the variety and novelty could provide fuel for new discussions that have become too difficult to tackle on a smaller private list.

5. How to start a mailing list

So, maybe you have decided that there is all, so that that fulfills your needs, and you have developed a vision of one. How about starting a list of all your own. Will it be possible? And how?

On the Internet, things get started by people who have access to the right resources and who are determined to start things. (They are rarely planned by groups of people or decided by organisations.) But the rest is carried on by everyone who joins and adds her thoughts and stays on, or comes and goes.

It is not actually very hard to run a mailing list, and some things are required from the person who is to be the listowner. She must have an idea what she is getting into, i.e. a necessary amount of net/knowledge and net expertise - acquired either over a longer time on many net/spaces, and/or by natural inclination and net/personality.

As a listowner, you are not like everyone else on the list. Far from it: you have the technical power to discontinue the list, and that makes the list **your** list, no matter how democratic a role everyone takes on a list. But also, you are not much more powerful than that: the subscribers can "leave" your list alive or not stay silent, or to speak up any time, which gives them, too, the power to keep "your" list alive at will.

So, how do you start a list and make it all happen?

First, you need to find the list a home: a system that houses the list of subscribers and which distributes the messages to all of them. Without that, there cannot be a mailing list.

Some small lists have been managed as simple lists of addresses that everyone on a list keeps in her address book. But that is not very practical in the long run.

If you look at the list of lesbian lists, you will see that very many lists are run at majordomo.org/guernet.org and other sites with a majordomo. [Majordomo](#) is a system specifically aimed at housing gay and lesbian and queer net resources, including mailing lists. There are a few other systems like that, and you might want to ask the people at those sites about housing your new list.

But if you have a stable address in some system that offers mailing list services, you could ask your own site or provider whether it is possible to start a mailing list locally. Some systems run majordomo, an easy and simple mail distribution system that you will soon learn to send administrative commands to, without too much trouble. There are other solutions for running mailing lists (listproc, listserv, etc. which are usually meant for heavier and larger lists, and which aren't quite as readily accessible to new listowners as majordomo). Sometimes there is a cost, and you have to decide whether it is a reasonable one.

If you have a UNIX shell account, there is also the simplest solution of just keeping the list of subscribers in your home directory, if your sysadmin is willing to let you run a list by defining a "mail alias address" for the list, so that mail sent to that address would be distributed to every address in the file you keep. Each new address would have to be added by manually editing the file. (U.S. sappho is still run in that way, as is Finnish sapfo as well).

No matter where or whom you ask to house your list, be prepared to explain how many subscribers it would have and how heavy a traffic it would be causing.

After you have received approval for starting a new list, it is only the beginning. Next, you have to compose the list statement of purpose, some guidelines and the basic technical advice. Maybe the most important part is the list statement of purpose. Be clear about what you mean. If you want to start a list called vegetarian-lesbians, you'll want to specify whether the list is for vegetarian lesbians, or for lesbians who want to discuss vegetarianism. Even if you don't want to restrict the topic, you still need to be clear about the focus. Otherwise, one day, your lesbian-vegetarians might be a list full of lesbian carnivores wondering why others would expect them to eat or like tofu, when they really want to eat meat.

Being a listowner means that you must read your e-mail often enough, be computer-literate enough to handle the basic routines (no wizardry is needed - you'll learn as you go), and likely to be around for a longer while. Don't start a mailing list if you think you won't be doing it the next year, or the next! Good nerves, some insight, and some visionary drive will be helpful ingredients in the making of a listowner, too.

As a listowner who has started a new interesting list, you will be praised for making the list happen. If you hold out in the job, as time goes on, you'll receive more praise and thanks, which goes somehow with the job. However, much of the job as a listowner will be pretty boring and repetitive. It can be a good idea not to take on too much and respect your own resources, knowing that they are limited. You'll probably face a fair share of technical problems, inexperienced or otherwise clumsy subscribers, and angry reactions from women who think that some of your policies suck. There are times when everything will go wrong - so if you are reluctant to face occasional crisis situations, listowning might not be for you.

Some of the lists I "own" have other people who are in charge, or in the position of a "list lady" as she is called - on one list (wild-list to be more specific), to look after the list as a social environment. It is the who posts about technicalities, forwards some information, reminds subscribers about what to do and not to do, and keeps the list afloat. On Euro-Sappho, which is a work-intensive list, many technical duties have been shared among volunteers from the list.

My own lists are run with four different sorts of list software on four different Finnish systems (majordomo, listproc, listserv, sendmail alias at seta.fi, uta.fi, funet.fi and helsinki.fi). My large lists (euro-sappho, wild-list, WISE-L, sapfo-list, naistutkimus) are public and open forums. Much of what I post to those lists is administrative. As to my other postings, I try to keep them manageable - personal enough, but not so much that I would feel somehow exposed or unsafe, on some big and sometimes quite energy consuming list.

There are lists where the purpose of the list is to provide a warm private, social space, and where the listowner is maintaining the social atmosphere of the list by commenting, being supportive of each member, and asking specific personalized questions, and only bothering them with as little administrative material as possible. But that is possible only when the list is not too big or open. When you have started a list, how do you advertise it? Announce it on a specific list called lesbian-news, on lists that have subscribers who might be particularly interested in your list, and also send an addition (the URL of the list's homepage, if it has one, or the list introduction and subscription information) to the list of lesbian lists, which is at: <http://www.lesbian.org/lesbian-lists/index.html>
<http://www.sappho.net/lesbian-lists/>

6. Life on a mailing list

Now, this is a topic too wide, long and large to summarise in a short and compact chapter. I've estimated that there are around 10,000 lesbians on lesbian mailing lists (and many more not subscribed to any lists at all). New women join those online communities every day. A new member of the Internet lesbian community has much out there to explore. There are already so many traditions, not to mention all the accumulated "netiquette", that entering an online community can feel almost as difficult as entering a real-life lesbian group.

I've written an essay about [Living with Nets](#), that covers some of this world, including engaging in online romances and listening to online voices, and I won't repeat those themes here.

Is it inevitable that those voices on your screen will grow louder than many women could ever imagine? Will accessing an online community, or belonging to one sometimes become too intense an experience?

I have a personal preference about belonging or not belonging, and friendships and community between members of a mailing list. I like to see some familiarity, some unfamiliarity, and some sense of community while the list stays, at the same time, an open place for new women to come to.

But many list members will meet in real life during the existence of this list, and form private connections and likings (and even dislikes). It is of course a good thing - but a list is there not only for forming those ties. It is there also for women for whom it is where they become inspired and/or warmed by the postings, even if they will never take any further steps to meet others here. I don't particularly like the idea of there being an "inner circle" of list members, consisting of those who have met, or who prefer to chat on the list primarily between each other.

Of my lists, Finnish sapfo-list has never been as intense as Euro-Sappho. Quite many Finns know each other by sight, and the excitement of the great far away unknown just behind one's screen simply is not there in the same way. But if those others are spread all over the map, quite many women find that easing their self-defences and tickling their dreams. Oh yes, one can write very poetically to women who haven't been witnesses to the real life matters you post about - and then enters someone you know who has been there, seen it all that, and at once you might start to check your writings and your gaze.

Some of the magic of Internet interactions lies in the power of your fantasies, and in the lure of the strange and unknown.

But the time might come when your days as an Internet novice are far away in the past, and the first year or two of new online experiences seem to have lost some intensity. Then, suddenly, it maybe doesn't seem "quite the same" anymore, and you start to think that the until then familiar list has changed. Did it change? Or did you?

When a woman gets online, joins mailing lists, and acquires "an online life", which can develop into an added dimension in her interactions and become quite real, she changes. After someone has been through more or less intense and/or interesting Internet experiences (friendships, loves, etc., inspirations, challenges, or simply has been sitting back in front/behind a computer, mostly reading and 'meeting' people verbally whom she would probably not have met in any other way), she changes in some way.

And some of the change is slow and subtle, though some women have had their lives turned topsy-turvy thanks to the Internet.

After a long time (months, a couple of years, longer?) women for whom the net and the contacts formed online have been transformative in some way, will move on. They have changed, and the list no longer feels quite the same list it used to be when they were fresh Internet users. At that point, they start to make changes, sometimes going away from mailing lists for a while. They start to focus those real life projects that were unfinished for years, or they start something quite new. Sometimes the inspiration they needed came from their online experience. Sometimes they come back, sometimes they don't. Meanwhile, new women join and start their online lives.

Thus there are and will be men who successfully present themselves as women on the net while being very definitely male in real life. (It has to be specified that transsexual women are welcome to join every lesbian list I know of, and aren't considered as males.)

On a large international mailing list, there is no way to check each subscriber thoroughly to make sure she is a woman. Just consider that there can be hundreds of women on a large list, and that the process of adding new subscribers can be the slower, the more carefully requests are checked. No one is subscribed to a women-only list without some initial research - fingering the account, taking a snip telnet to the host, doing vvvw searches and so on. If all else fails, one will be asked to write back and confirm that one is a woman.

Voice verifying is in use in some internet spaces: on IRC channels, and on some small and private mailing lists. However, it is plain impractical for people voice verifying or other such entrance examinations for new subscribers of large, open lesbian lists - quite simply because it would be too stressful to achieve in the long run. Also, voice verification does not always work, either.

The matter of men accessing women only lists has been discussed as well there have been lesbian lists. Every time a new subscriber sends a request - and there can be several requests in one day - one has to decide whether a particular request is from a woman or not. One has to try to not exclude women, no matter how obscure their accounts stand, as they are still likely to be a lesbian (and almost all are).

It can be quite difficult to stop a man who is determined to turn on a lesbian list, as such people do acquire some skills in getting access. It is quite easy to get a new user account from some large provider and try to subscribe it to a list. So, if you suspect that someone is in fact male, and if he is then found out and unsubscribed, there is no guarantee that he won't be back again the next week.

There are women who have sent legitimate requests from accounts that belong their husbands and who have been verified to be women all right. Just think that it can apply vice versa: there must be men using accounts that belong to their wives!

My approach to the unwanted presence of the very few subscribers who have lied about themselves in order to be on a women only list is: if they manage to keep in hiding, just ignore them. Women are a huge majority on a women-only list. That might mean a couple of hundred women against an occasional sly male intruder, and that is quite a strong number. I prefer to enjoy the presence of all these women, not spending too much of energy for hunting down the few male intruders.

8. About mail load, and what you need to know about it

Internet is a huge space with innumerable bytes travelling back and forth. The netique it grows, the more strained the resources will become. Thus the most basic reasoning behind many netiquette rules is not to cause a **load** that will saturate the available resources.

I'll give an example.

Euro-Sappho is run at seta.fi, a small server owned by the Finnish national gay/lesbian/etc. rights organisation (SETA). Soon after the list started, it became quite busy. There was a point in the history of the list when it was responsible for a very large share of the seta.fi international traffic measured in bytes. Back then, when seta.fi had a connectivity provider that billed it on basis of the volume of that traffic, so that the list directly caused unreasonable costs to the host system.

I have never wanted to move that list to another system as the list has had a very good home at seta.fi, with a sysadmin who has always most generously tried his best to keep the list running no matter what. Also, with the switch of connectivity providers in 1996, the billing system of the seta.fi international traffic changed, making it possible to keep Euro-Sappho there, as long as the load caused by the list stays reasonable.

But one to explain what this "load" is about. A typical posting, with headers and the actual text, is 2700 bytes long (I estimated this from a sample of 340 postings). That means that a typical posting causes some 270x2700 bytes of traffic plus bonuses and warnings about delayed mails. That is approximately 730000 bytes per mail. There was 30 pieces of mail per day (over the period of 10 days during which those 300 postings were made). That meant 30x730000 bytes per day, or somewhere over 20 megabytes in one day - over 650 megabytes in one month.

And consider, also, that each of those mails that are sent are sent separately - causing a Finnish machine to connect to your provider's machine to establish a mail connection for each 30 mails a day. (Digest subscribers take off some of that load by their choice to receive mails in a digest that is sent out 1-2 times a day, usually).

This is one reason why subscribers are asked so often to avoid quoting much, and why one should NEVER send attached files, huge postings, chain letters, virus warnings (which are practically always false) or such to mailing lists. Also, it is why it is often preferable not to send several short postings, if one can instead include several answers into one posting.

There are quite a few readers that subscribe to Euro-Sappho through a German women's BBS (woman.de), i.e. they are not subscribed to the list individually so that mail from seta.fi would go to each of them separately, but instead, it goes to the address of the women-only BBS. Women maintainers of that Euro-Sappho there have to request access to the euro-sappho area from the BBS maintainers. (Thus, they are also 'subscribers' in a way, and not just anonymous pairs of eyes out there.) And those women can send mail to the list despite their addresses still not among the Euro-Sappho addresses at seta.fi. This is a good arrangement as it decreases seta.fi mail load.

9. Lesbian online geographies

Some numbers: Of the 60 lists in the list of lesbian lists (in January 1997), 50 were running on U.S. servers. 35 of those 60 lists use English as their only or primary language. The first U.S. list started in 1987 and the first European list in 1993. Of the lesbian online population, approximately 9/10 or more are from North America.

The main purpose of the first international European lesbian list, Euro-Sappho, was to serve as the home base for European lesbians and bisexual/queer women. Likewise, the wild-list for European lesbian studies was started to facilitate networking and contacts between European women involved in lesbian and queer studies. Both of those lists have however been open to all women who have wanted to join.

When Euro-Sappho was started in July 1994, a fairly considerable number of North Americans joined it at once. In the beginning, reaching out to more Europeans and to building the list into the European forum it became was slow work. When I looked at my archives, I found out that in mid-July 1994, there were 67 women subscribed to Euro-Sappho. 26 of them were from North American addresses, i.e. almost 40 percent. Since those days, the number of European subscribers has fortunately grown so that less than one third of subscribers were from outside Europe in January 1997.

The main reason that the net-area of North America is historically specific is the fact that the overwhelming majority of Internet users, particularly of female Internet users, are currently located there. That is where a very large part of the resources and users are, great amounts of them, compared to the rest of the globe. This is a direct result of the fact that Internet started in the U.S. and that most net-resources are still more accessible there.

I see the imbalance in numbers and resources daily, as so very many requests to join European lists come from North America, while the number of subscribers and requests from places like Australia, Japan, New Zealand and Brazil stays rather small.

The point in starting European and other geographically local lists is not, and has never been to fight against North American presence on the Internet, but to create some space and support to the so far very few European and other presences instead.

I might add more - no promises though.